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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 003135

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SUBJECT: ELECTION SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

Classified By: Haynes Mahoney, PA

1. (C) Summary. In the three remaining weeks before the June 17 Parliamentary elections the Mission is coordinating with MEPI-funded NGOs, including the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) to strengthen the electoral process and traditions, to encourage participation by women and youth, and to ensure that the elections are as transparent and fair as possible. We are sensitive to that fine line between the need to inform the GOJ of USG-funded activities while encouraging the Jordanian officials to allow maximum leeway for non-governmental activity aimed at strengthening the elections' credibility. In his meetings with the Ambassador and with the PAO and USAID Director Planning Minister Bassem Awadullah has been generally supportive of our election programming, expressing the caveat that it should be low profile, lest --as he told the PAO and USAID Director-- Islamists with an anti-U.S. agenda claim that the USG is trying to skew the election results. So far, both the Mission's Public Affairs Section and the U.S. NGOs have been able to conduct a number of activities such as advising female candidates, training journalists on election coverage, and providing fora in which candidates can debate and convey their message to the electorate. These activities have all been conducted under the auspices of Jordanian civic organizations. End summary.

Supporting Women Candidates

2. (U) Both the Mission and the NGOs have supported Jordanian women who are running for the six women's quota seats or hoping to beat male candidates outright. Public Affairs arranged the program of U.S. campaign manager Daryl Glenn who counseled 18 out of the 36 registered female candidates during her IIP-sponsored May 18-27 visit. In individual sessions arranged by the Jordanian National Women's Forum, Ms. Glenn advised the candidates --who represented the full political spectrum-- on shaping their messages and maximizing their resources in the final stages before election day. PA has also given the National Women's Forum a grant to fund a phone bank, enabling any female candidate who wishes to canvass her constituents by phone.

3. (C) Simultaneously NDI in cooperation with the Women's Forum, a Jordanian NGO, raised funds from the Canadian Embassy and some local corporations to produce TV spots and SMS mobile phone text messages urging voters to elect women. There was some initial misunderstandings among some Jordanian NGO leaders who thought that NDI was funding individual candidates, but their representatives told the Mission that they have since clarified that the TV spots and SMS messages are strictly generic. NDI hopes that two Jordanian TV stations and possibly one Arab satellite broadcaster will air the messages. They likewise plan to develop a manual for women candidates in future elections and to support media training by the Women's Media Center, a Jordanian NGO. NDI is also contacting international media and encouraging them to focus on the high level of activity by female candidates in this conservative, male-oriented society.

Engaging the Electorate

4. (C) To focus Jordanian journalists on the "so-what" aspect of their reporting about the elections, PA is funding an ongoing three-day workshop featuring the IIP-sponsored American journalism professor Tom Warhover and an Egyptian counterpart. The training, which is being conducted by an NGO --the Jordanian Committee for the Defense of the Freedom of Journalists-- will focus on reporting skills plus the legal and political environment and will include hands-on training in the form of interviews and coverage of a debate between actual candidates. NDI and IRI both plan on "town meetings" and other fora enabling candidates to debate and answer the electorate's questions. Working with the local branch of Transparency International, NDI is organizing a local NGO which will assess the election environment and possibly lay the groundwork for a future monitoring organization. IRI also plans on assessing voter priorities and motivations through an exit poll conducted by a local Jordanian organization.

5. (U) Election apathy has been a particular problem among Jordanian youth. Using MEPI funds, the IRI therefore plans to hold three "mock parliaments," for university-age students

in different regions under the auspices of the Princess Basma Youth Resources Center --an "NGO" associated with the Royal Court. Similarly, NDI plans to hold a televised "town hall meeting" between candidates and youth, which they hope will be broadcast on JTV.

Modest but Hopeful Expectations

16. (C) Jordanians expect turnout to be modest for the elections, an expectation confirmed by casual conversations. Among the elite business community, students and workers the question is: "What can the Parliament do for me?" Many doubt that the government will allow the truly qualified opposition politicians to run or be elected, and there are many complaints about the skewed delineation of election districts to disadvantage the urban and Palestinian voters. The most hopeful aspect, in many Jordanians' eyes, are the six women's quota seats, for which there is a high level of competition and public interest.

(C) Nevertheless, assuming the elections are perceived to be relatively transparent and fair compared to the last elections of 1997, where stuffed ballots and other irregularities were common, they could be a positive step towards representative government. Our Mission activities and those by the MEPI-supported NGOs aim at providing candidates, especially women, with campaigning skills and at awakening an interest among the youth. We hope our activities will pave the way for increased participation in future elections. Also, the holding of relatively free and fair elections soon after the Iraq war and just prior to the June 21-23 World Economic Forum will send an important message about Jordanian stability and commitment to democratic progress.

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